



bell hooks

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The heart of intellectual work is critical engagement with ideas. While one reads, studies, and at time writes, a significant part of that work is time spent in contemplation and reflection. Even though an exchange of ideas can and does take place in a communal context, there is necessarily a private solitary dimension to intellectual work.

— Killing Rage

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Quick Facts

- * Born in 1952
- * African-American poet, academic, and filmmaker
- * Her first published book is *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981)

Biography

An intellectual and a scholar, bell hooks is devoted to critical consciousness and awareness of oneself and society. Born in Hopkinsville, Kentucky on September 25, 1952, bell hooks, née Gloria Watkins, has been critically conscious since childhood. She made her “commitment to intellectual life in the segregated black world of [her] childhood,” and later pursued a B.A. in 1973 from Stanford University. This led to an M.A. in 1976 from the University of Wisconsin and a Ph.D. in 1983 from the University of California, Santa Cruz. Although currently a scholar teaching at the City College of New York, hooks continues to maintain that intellectual work need not come from academia, and that being in academia (as she experienced at Stanford) is often an impediment to true intellectual thought.

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Biography continued

Always passionate and intent on calling individuals to recognize and change the negative repercussions of what she terms the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” that structures this society, hooks nonetheless found time to pursue a formal academic inquiry in English, writing her dissertation on the works of Toni Morrison. Her love of English and language combined with her rage toward the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy led her to begin writing her first book, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, when she was 19 years old. Production of the book took eight years of research and many revisions. In it she begins to explore the issues which later become a continuing paradigm throughout her works.

hooks urges an end to the degradation and exploitation of black women, arguing that this is an integral step in alleviating white supremacy. hooks' main concern is with black women, however, her analysis of black women's current situation in the social hierarchy necessarily comes to deal with race and class, as well as gender. In her later books, hooks begins to critique popular culture. Her book *Outlaw Culture* and her film *Cultural Criticism and Transformation* are dedicated solely to hooks' desire to nurture in her readers a “critical eye.”

hooks is committed to her ideas and that is evident in her use of a pseudonym. hooks decided to use a pseudonym both to honor her grandmother (whose name she took) and her mother, but also because the name Gloria became associated with an identity that was not completely hers. By using “bell hooks,” she was able to reclaim her voice and identity. It is hooks' commitment to her ideas, however, that led her to decapitalize her name. Both the decapitalization and the pseudonym itself are attempts to take the reader's focus away from the author and place it on the content of the work. For hooks, her ideas come first and foremost, before her name and personal identity.



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